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AUTHOR Bladh, Agneta
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ABSTRACT

Approaches to analyze the reform of higher education in Sweden, and particularly the organization of studies in higher education, are considered. Three starting points are as follows: examining the intentions constituting the background to the present organization of studies, considering continuing developments and attitudes toward problems; and analyzing the educational structure existing when the reform is implemented. Aims of the new organization of studies were that a diversity of forms was to be superseded by uniformity, and that it would also be flexible for new developments. Uniformity was designed to provide greater clarity about the range of educational opportunities to assist prospective students and employers. The organization of studies was also designed to provide clearer documentation for the decision-making bodies. To elucidate the structure of the range of separate courses, a survey will be undertaken of courses at all higher education units in three higher education regions. Additional assessment areas are considered. (SW)

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CURRENT PROJECT

TITLE OF PROJECT

THE ORGANIZATION OF STUDIES IN THE NEW SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

IN PROGRESS AT

Department of Political Science
University of Stockholm
S-106 91 STOCKHOLM
SWEDEN
Tel. 08-15 04 80, ext. 157

PROJECT LEADER

Agneta Bladh, B.A.

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PURPOSE

The task entrusted to UHÄ/NBUC of following up the reform of higher education includes among other things studying the function of the organization of studies in higher education. The organization of studies is taken here to comprise the regulations in accordance with which higher education has to be organized, e.g. study programmes of various kinds and separate courses.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The common starting point for analysing the outcome of a measure taken is to trace its background and the predominant intentions. With this approach a follow-up of the organization of studies would begin with the *aims and intentions constituting the background to the present organization of studies.* This in my opinion is a necessary but insufficient starting point for following up the organization of studies.

HE013 147

The reform of higher education has involved both organization changes and other novel conditions (e.g. new rules of admission and a new system of finance and budgeting) which are intended as the means to a continuing transformation and development of higher education activities. Transformation of the forms and content of education can be promoted or inhibited, depending on how dynamic the rules are which surround that education. Furthermore, various protagonists in higher education have to learn to handle these rules and the opportunities they provide as compared with previous rules. Thus the implementation of the reform of higher education is not a single action but a process which began in July 1977 and is still going on. *The chronological dimension* therefore provides another starting point for following up the organization of studies. New problems are raised, new conditions may come to apply (e.g. the resolution concerning a totally dimensioned higher education system), transforming attitudes towards problems. Because of this changeability, a measure cannot be followed up solely with reference to the aims and intentions making up its background. The problems existing when a decision is made are not necessarily those applying during the investigatory stage or when the decision comes to be put into effect. Allowances for the chronological dimension also have to be extended to the point in time at which the follow-up investigation is conducted.

A third starting point for following up the organization of studies is *the educational structure existing when the reform comes to be implemented*. The introduction of a reform seldom implies the total demolition of the pre-existing edifice in order to make way for something new. Activities cannot be suspended to allow anything of this kind; instead they generally continue uninterrupted. Consequently a reform, particularly during its initial stages, necessarily implies adjustment to the current situation. The instruction existing within the higher education system before 1st July 1977 was incorporated in the new organization of studies, and therefore the function of the organization of studies cannot be read off until the new system has been operative for some time. Again, the feasibility of immediately implementing the new organization of studies differs from one part of the higher education system to another, because the congruence of existing instruction with the new organization of studies also varies. The different base structures applying before 1st July 1977 probably helped to shape attitudes and values with regard to higher education. Together with educational structures in the previous organization of studies, these

values provide a third starting point for following up the organization of studies. They constitute the base from which the new organization of studies has to be realized.

The organization of studies constitutes one of the means of attaining the objectives of the reform. The realization of the organization of studies involves all three of the starting points mentioned above: *intentions, existing structure and changes over time.*

PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS

Uniformity and consistency were the main ideas underlying the organization of studies in the new system of higher education. Higher education used to be organized in a host of different ways, and the demands made also varied a great deal. With the new organization of studies, the diversity of forms was to be superseded by uniformity in order to make the organization plainer to students and prospective employers alike, and also to facilitate educational planning and development. Essentially different types of education were to be incorporated in this uniform organization of studies. Thus the new organization of studies was to be subject to more generalized planning, but it was also to be a flexible instrument for the development of education along new lines and for facilitating the co-ordination of courses of education which had formerly amounted almost to watertight compartments. For facility of control there had to be firmness of organization, especially as regards long-term courses of studies such as study programmes. Flexibility, on the other hand, required a pliable system which would be readily adaptable to new situations. Thus the new organization of studies meant striking a balance between firmness and flexibility.

Given our three starting points - (i) intentions, (ii) chronological dimension and (iii) pre-reform structure - the study organization project will focus mainly on the diversity-uniformity and firmness-flexibility dimensions. Thus the main points of inquiry for the project will be as follows.

(A) What has been the outcome of the organization of studies in relation to the intentions?

How great a degree of uniformity has the organization of studies led to?

Does the uniformity of the organization of studies throughout the higher education system provide greater clarity and a more comprehensive appreciation of the range of educational opportunities from the viewpoint of prospective students and employers?

Does the organization of studies facilitate the renewal by the higher education authorities of the range of educational opportunities and the development of the content and teaching forms of education?

Has the organization of studies led to clearer and more tangible documentation for the decision-making bodies in their deliberations concerning the dimensioning and localization of education and the allocation of monies?

(B) How has the reform been affected by changes over time?

What deviations from the originally intended system have occurred during the evolution of the reform?

(C) To what extent have the previous educational structure and the institutional structure within the basic units of higher education influenced the organization of studies?

How does the organization of studies fit in with the various schemes within the higher education system?

How successfully has a balance been struck between firmness and flexibility?

Does the emphasis of this balance differ between different parts of the higher education system?

Are different meanings attached to the concepts within different study programmes?

THE ORGANIZATION OF STUDIES IN VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES

The points of inquiry pursued by the study organization project can also be expected to vary with the approach adopted towards the assignment. The approaches in turn will depend on the position in the system from which one starts. Different protagonists predominate in different positions. The function of the organization of studies can be differently interpreted by different protagonists. Thus students may take one view, teachers another, departments a third, programme committees a fourth and so on. What is more, viewpoints can vary within a single group of protagonists. For example, we are not entitled to assume that the majority of students share an identical view of the organization of studies, any more than the majority of teachers can be said to do so. The adoption of a single student or teacher perspective therefore involves obvious difficulties. It should be

relatively simple, however, to elicit data showing how students have used the organization of studies. Actual use will in turn depend on several different factors, e.g. the way in which the higher education unit markets its education via information material and study counsellors, and the views expressed by fellow-students and teachers concerning the organization of studies. The organization of studies should be followed up from several different vantage points: from that of the overriding authority, from that of a higher education unit or a department, from that of the students and, perhaps, of prospective employers, and according to the various substances or corpuses of knowledge which higher education comprises.

STRATEGY

The material will have to be delimited and arranged into groups in order to prevent the project from becoming unwieldy. Some of the sub-groupings are indicated in the following section.

Separate courses

To elucidate the structure of the range of separate courses, a survey will be made of courses at all higher education units in three higher education regions (Umeå, Stockholm and Uppsala). The repertoire will be charted for each academic year since the implementation of the higher education reform, possibly together with a reference year under the previous system of studies (1973/74). It will thus be possible for changes in the repertoire of courses to be reflected in relation to the range of courses before 1st July 1977 and during the period for which the new higher education system has been operative. The following are examples of data which can be collected concerning each course:

- "sectoral identity"
- subject grouping
- type of course
- level/specialization
- scope in credits
- forms of study
- connection with programme studies
- geographical distribution.

Of these variables, it is above all "type of course" that demands further explanation. Various divisions

are of course possible. One such division implies starting with the needs that separate courses were intended to cater for: subsequent training, further training, other clearly vocational training, training in association with trade unions and other organizations and instruction of general educational interest. But the need for which a course provides is not uniform to all students taking the course. Consequently a course cannot be unequivocally classified as, say, a further training course or clearly vocational training. A classification other than that based on the needs of the students is therefore required.

A first stage involves division into subject area groups as proposed by the STUDOK Commission. A second stage involves grouping based on a division into research training subject areas, other subject areas in which specialized studies are possible and other subject areas in which studies comprise not more than 20 credits.

In addition to this exploration of opportunities, the sub-project concerning separate courses will involve special analyses of the following:

- various views concerning the structure of the existing repertoire and various articulated efforts to bring about change
- separate courses as renewal capacity: the flexibility of the system
- the emergence of separate courses. Where do the initiatives come from? On what knowledge are new courses based (knowledge from working life, knowledge from research, knowledge from programme studies, etc.)? How is a repertoire of educational opportunities shaped?
- study patterns among the students
- changes undergone by subject content.

Programme studies

How do the study programmes relate to the idea of flexibility and interchangeability? The organization of studies is discussed in one of the debate publications issued by the 1968 Educational Commission on Higher Education. That publication stresses the importance of the education system being pliable. Part of this pliability is for programmes to be differentiated as late as possible. Furthermore, study units within the programme, especially at the commencement of studies, must be adaptable to several needs. Are

these criteria of pliability shared by different decision-making authorities in the education sector? What different solutions exist regarding programme studies? What sort of a balance is struck between firmness and flexibility? What are the differences at the point of departure, with various solutions existing? Institutional structure? Cognitive content? Tradition?

A closer follow-up of programme studies appears most interesting in the former arts faculties, which have no longstanding tradition of programme studies. Efforts to achieve firmness are important here, because in the former system maximum provision was made for flexibility. What difficulties were involved when this part of the higher education establishment had to adapt its education to a programme system? Do initial conditions vary from one part of the arts faculties to another? What different solutions have been chosen with regard to the introduction of programme studies? What view of programme studies is taken by different programme committees and departments?

Possible difficulties in connection with the implementation of the reform can be sought in the lack of agreement between the intended organizational structure and the existing one. The existing structure may be less suitable for the purposes of the reform and may therefore lead to a drastic impairment of the feasibility of implementing the reform.

The dynamics of the organization of studies

The interaction of the different forms of education: how does the overall organization of studies operate with a view to the development and renewal of education? How do local programmes relate to general programmes? What balances prevail between local programmes and separate courses? What role can individual programmes conceivably acquire when the separate courses have a limited number of places?

How has the organization of studies operated as a planning instrument from the vantage point of various systematic positions within the higher education establishment? What changes are desired concerning the process of interaction within the organization of studies? What part does the new system of finance play in the development of the repertoire of educational opportunities?

Is the organization of studies conducive to unconventional educational solutions? One of the aims of introducing a uniform organization of studies throughout the higher education system was to facilitate co-operation across boundaries formerly existing between different sectors of higher

education. Has the organization of studies led to any more unconventional solutions of this kind in any aspect of educational design?

TIMETABLE

Each sub-project is relatively comprehensive. The sub-projects will for the most part proceed concurrently, and each of them is intended to result in a report. These reports will probably be published in the order in which the sub-projects are enumerated, and the first report should appear early in 1981.

Agneta Bladh

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Civiltryck AB Stockholm 1980
LF/ALLF 282 80 046